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ABSTRACT

A small-scale study of Fordham University (New York) English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher trainees (n=11) investigated the extent to which the teachers, in a practicum, reflected on issues that are the focus of the ESL teacher education program. Specifically, it asked: whether teachers have a thorough understanding of theory and research on second language learning and teaching; what philosophy is manifested in their teaching; how their teaching philosophy is reflected in practice; perceived teaching strengths and weaknesses; overall knowledge of limited English-proficient (LEP) students' language and cognitive development; and the strategies planned and implemented for students' English development and academic achievement. Results indicate that the teachers, while demonstrating varied and strong philosophy of learning and teaching, believed teaching consists mainly of management and social roles and were less geared to issues of language and cognitive development. Discrepancies were found in the teachers' stated philosophies, written reflections, and classroom practice. Better instruction concerning reflective teaching at all stages of preservice teacher education is recommended. (MSE)

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A REFLECTION ON REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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A REFLECTION ON REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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This exploratory study was conducted with students of Fordham University Graduate School of Education during the Spring of 1994 who were pursuing a Masters degree in Education with a specialization in Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL) and who were enrolled in a college supervised field experience course. The authors (the coordinator of the TESOL Program who was the designated instructor for the course and an ESL teacher from China who was spending a full year sabbatical in New York City) conducted a small study to assess the types of reflection of a small group of English as second language (ESL) teachers (11) to identify to what extent teachers reflect on those very important aspects that were the focus of the TESOL teacher education program.

The Fordham University TESOL Program knowledge core is based on three general principles: (a) current theoretical teaching principles and practices on second language teaching and learning, (b) emphasis on language and cognitive development of limited English proficient (LEP) students, and (c) development of reflective practitioners. These theories and teaching practices were emphasized throughout the Program. Thus, the study attempted to identify whether teachers' reflections went beyond conventional procedures grounded on basic, low level, passive skills instruction and if they engaged in teaching processes which foster higher order skills that take cognitive, social, cultural and linguistic knowledge into consideration. The guiding questions of the study were:

1. Do teachers have a thorough understanding of theory and research on second language learning and teaching?
2. What philosophy of teaching do teachers manifest?
3. How is the teacher's philosophy of teaching reflected in their instructional teaching practices?
4. What are the teachers' perceived teaching strengths?
5. What are the teachers' perceived teaching weaknesses?
6. What is the participants' overall knowledge of LEP students' language and cognitive development?

7. What types of strategies teachers plan and implement for students' English development and academic achievement? Specifically, how frequently are the following strategies mentioned and for what purpose?

a. sheltering instruction
b. integrating language and content
c. contextualizing learning (providing visual support, planned meaningful redundancy)
d. creating cooperative/collaborative learning/environments to foster social, linguistic and cognitive skills
e. infusing higher - order cognitive skills in all aspects of classroom activity
f. teaching and use of metacognitive skills
g. negotiation of meaning within natural learning contexts
h. other collaborative instructional modes

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE IN TEACHING

The emphasis on the role of the teacher as a reflective, instructional decision maker has evolved since the 1980s. As a result of this emphasis, teacher education programs have focused on the development of reflection as part of an effective, decision maker practitioner. Back in 1920, Henry W. Holmes said that the training of teachers is a highly significant part of the making of a nation, and he recommended preparing teachers who had the power of critical analysis and a mind broadly and deeply informed (The Holmes group, 1986). This general principle guides Fordham University TESOL Program. The Program provides students with intensive theory and practice on second language teaching and learning, and it moves students toward a reflective approach of teaching.

Reflection helps teachers to improve their teaching, moving them beyond the development of students' grammatical English proficiency to a broader perspective of teaching as a creative problem solving endeavor (Schon, 1987). In order for reflection to be effective and satisfying, practitioners need to have a vision in mind of what is a desirable classroom and an effective teacher. Throughout the TESOL program teachers (or prospective teachers) (through readings, lectures, observations, and demonstrations) develop their own assumptions and beliefs, both conscious and tacit, about the purpose of schooling, how students learn, and what should be taught to help LEP students linguistically, academically and socially in a new educational setting and through a new (second) language. The Program helps these teachers to develop a philosophy of teaching that reflects current theory and

practice of second language learning and teaching and develops their own future expectations which affect their reflection and teaching.

Although Schon (1987) recommends reflection "**-in-action**" (making multitudes of decisions and trying out various actions), teachers in this study were asked to reflect "**on action**", (analitical thinking after the lesson was completed). Teachers reflected on their teaching, how effective they were, or what other elements impeded them to be effective in guiding LEP students in the development of linguistic and cognitive skills. Glesne (1991) sees the benefits of reflective teaching as fostering teachers' reflective thinking and inquiry into their own teaching practices, and ultimately, effecting change in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

The field experience (practicum) of the TESOL Program is usually structured once a year. Throughout the Program, students prepare a plan for the field experience that include the setting, the school level, the type of ESL teacher, mentor, and the type of ESL students in the prospective ESL classroom. This plan is finalized and approved by the coordinator of the Program two months prior to the beginning of the field experience.

Eleven experienced teachers majoring in TESOL were included in the study. Participation was determined through the enrollment in the college supervised TESOL practicum. Teachers who enrolled in the practicum are usually experienced teachers currently teaching, although not necessarily teaching ESL. These teachers had already finished their course work and were enrolled in the field experience (practicum) during their last college semester. All of the participating teachers were not teaching ESL at the time of this study; therefore, they were asked to plan with their respective supervisor to be assigned to teach ESL for at least one hour a day. They were also required to participate in a bi-weekly seminar housed at Fordham University in which the main purpose of the seminar was to provide guidance and a forum to reflect on their daily ESL teaching.

In addition to the daily ESL teaching, participating teachers were required to prepare a portfolio to include: (a) philosophy of teaching, (b) perceived teaching weaknesses and strengths, (d) daily journal, (d) participation in staff development activities outside the school and the University, (e) daily lesson plans, (f) case studies of students, (g) video tape of a lesson with a personal written reflection, (h) observation of other ESL teachers, and (i) weekly summaries of lessons focusing on the development of cognitive and linguistic skills. All this information was available at any time, at the school or at the university, and students were required to carry

their portfolios at all times. The college supervisor asked the permission of the participating teachers to examine their portfolios which were collected three times during the semester.

Data analysis included an ethnographic approach that included listing all data collected for each of the 11 teachers; the data were coded, and categorized by teacher and by variable (as indicated in the research questions). Once the information was categorized, percentages were calculated for the number of teachers' responses that fell into each category. Mean category percentages were computed for each of the identified variables.

FINDINGS

Participating teachers showed a varied professional background. There were four teachers with 10 years of teaching experience, while the rest of the teachers had 2 years or less of actual teaching experience. None of the teachers were teaching ESL at the time of the study and eight of the 11 teachers had prior experience teaching English abroad in a foreign country to non-English speakers. Most of the teachers have taught English without any prior ESL college teaching preparation.

Participants' Philosophy of Teaching

Although, teachers showed a variety of teaching philosophical trends, there were several areas that were mentioned by a majority of the teachers (85%-98%) as important areas in their philosophies of teaching:

1. **Importance of understanding LEP students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds.** Data indicated that participating teachers felt that ESL teachers ought to know the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students in order to understand their learning styles and the appropriate instructional practices, as well as to become more sensitive, themselves, of the students' linguistic and cognitive strengths and weaknesses.

2. **Learning needs to be meaningful.** Teachers expressed that in order for students to be motivated and interested in the learning process, the learning experience provided to them has to have a practical or instrumental value.

3. **Teaching for understanding is important in order to help LEP students to become decision makers.** Teachers commented that teaching grammar or mechanical English skills, without providing opportunities to students to use these skills in every day situations, was superficial and not meeting the student linguistic survival needs.

4. **Teachers need to promote a positive self esteem in LEP students.** Teachers commented the need for students to find an ESL classroom/educational setting in which students are respected for what they are, and should not be ridiculed for their limitations with the English language.

Although teachers did not agree in their perceived preferrered instructional strategies, 60% or more indicated that using LEP students' real life experiences in their teaching was an important component in their teaching.

The teachers' self perceived teaching strengths included: (a) a loving caring person, (b) ability to analyze linguistic and cultural differences in the classroom, and (c) being a role model to students. Their perceived weaknesses included the lack of ability to work with different linguistic levels at the same time, and classroom management.- how to maintain the attention of all the students throughout the lesson, and how to re-direct behavioral problems.

Participants' Understanding of LEP Students Language and Cognitive Development

Data analyzed indicated that although teachers comments in their philosophy of teaching showed that they were knowledgeable on theories, research and successful practices in the area of second language acquisition and learning, classroom observations, analysis of lesson plans and information provided in the description of individual LEP students' case studies (conducted by participating teachers) indicated that their understanding of LEP students' language and cognitive development was a simplistic one. The following list identifies the cognitive and linguistic areas that were mostly mentioned by teachers.

Language Development	Percent	Cognitive Development	Percent
Vocabulary development	92	Following directions	95
Verbal skills	90	Interpreting settings	90
Grammar	90	Creating stories	80
Pronunciation/diction	85	Classifying	80
Reading aloud	85	Listing	75
Skills oriented exercises	80	Sequencing	60
Reading silently	80	Concept development	40

The list is a short one and does not provide evidence that teachers consciously and deliberately push students beyond their current individual capabilities toward goals that focus on higher thinking cognitive processes. Teachers, in general taught (and later, on reflected on) the following language and cognitive aspects.

Analysis of teachers' reflective journals indicated that teachers reflected mainly on general behaviors of the students and not necessarily on their cognitive and linguistic development. Comments of teachers about their LEP students (expressed by 75% or more of the teachers) included the following statements:

quite bright	no spoken English language
quick thinker	is in the silence period
positive English language attitude	speaks in words
listens carefully	low writing ability
good L1 background	behavior problems
matured	below reading level
mature for his age	no attention span
responds well to visuals	does not make an effort
sharp	discouraged
listens carefully	cannot write
good behavior	cannot read

Types of Teaching Strategies Teachers Plan and Implement

Analysis of data (especially data from lesson plans, tutorials and reflective journal) identified the following teaching strategies as the most used by teachers:

Strategy	Percent
Use of pictures to introduce vocabulary	95
Reading aloud	90
Reading silently	80
Answering (oral or written) factual information	80
Integrating language and content	80
Grammatical explanations	80
Oral discussions	80
Emphasis on pattern drills	75
Writing individual short stories	60
Language experience approach	45
Use of tape recorder for listening comprehension	40

The above findings tend to indicate that, although throughout the TESOL Program teachers are familiar with wholistic, collaborative and higher thinking strategies, teachers did not use these practices in their daily lessons, nor they reflect on instructional practices that may contribute to LEP students' development of high cognitive and linguistic skills.

Areas Teachers Spent Most of the Time Reflecting On

Teachers reflected on a variety of issues, most of them related to the individual teacher classroom situation. The following chart presents a summary of those reflections.

Figure 1: Teachers Reflection on Teaching.

How to teach writing, use of effective L2 strategies, how to ask effective question, how to effectively teach writing, language development of students, assessment of language growth (10%)
Classroom location, mainstreaming LEP students, teaching learning disable students in ESL classroom, how L1 helps L2 (15% teachers)
Disappointment with lesson outcomes, grouping students, motivaring students, materials used in lesson, speaking abilities of students, language development of students (25%)
Lesson preparation, classroom management, class linguistic/ethnic diversity, language learning process, classroom interaction, and class participation. (50%)

The above figure shows that most of the teachers were more concerned with the management of students' behaviors and classroom conditions rather than their individual teaching practices and sucesses.

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The relationship between teachers' belief and classroom practice has been posited as an important factor in changing behaviors. For about four months 11 TESOL teachers reflected on their own teaching. The results of this exploratory study indicate that TESOL teachers, although demonstrating a varied and strong philosophy of learning and teaching, believe that teaching consists mainly of management and social roles. Although teachers manifested knowledge of the processes and practices involved in the development of second language and cognitive development, their reflection, as well as their teaching, were less geared to these principles. Their philosophy of teaching, their weekly reflections, and their instructional practices did not match. For example, although their philosophy of teaching emphasized teaching for understanding meaning, teachers' instructional practices were still mechanical and skill oriented.

The results of this study show the need to increase teacher participation in reflective teaching with the purpose of improving their teaching strategies in developing students' English proficiency, cognitive development through higher thinking approaches. The TESOL Program should include a process to help participants become effective reflective practitioners. Teacher training programs need to be designed to increase awareness of the role of inquiry and reflective decision-making in teaching. This study supports the implementation of a reflective teaching process that starts from the beginning of the program and culminates with the field teaching experience.

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